

How Is Your School District Performing?



A look at
Newburyport
Public Schools

2004–2006



EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Newburyport Public Schools, Kevin Lyons; the school department staff; and the town officials of Newburyport.

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INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

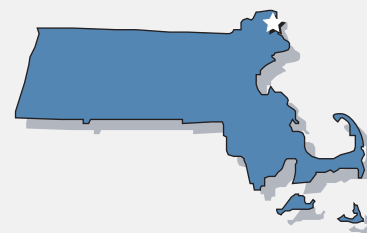
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In February 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Newburyport Public Schools for the period of 2004–2006. This school district was selected for a site review. The EQA analyzed Newburyport students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Newburyport Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Newburyport, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 17,189

Median family income: \$73,306

Largest sources of employment:
Education, health, and social services;
and manufacturing

Local government: Mayor-Council

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 7 members

Number of schools: 5

Student-teacher ratio: 12.9 to 1

Per Pupil Expenditures: \$11,071

Student enrollment:

Total: 2,374

White: 96.2 percent

Hispanic: 1.3 percent

African-American: 0.8 percent

Asian-American: 1.5 percent

Native American: 0.1 percent

Limited English proficient:
0.3 percent

Low income: 7.5 percent

Special education: 15.1 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and
Massachusetts Department of Education.

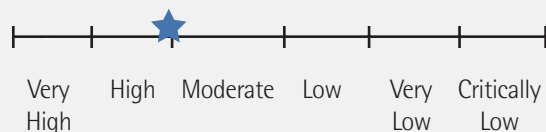
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

The Educational Management Audit Council accepted this report and its findings at their meeting of October 1, 2007.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	82	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	91	84
Math Proficiency Index	73	72

Performance Rating



The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and sub-groups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Newburyport participated at levels which met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

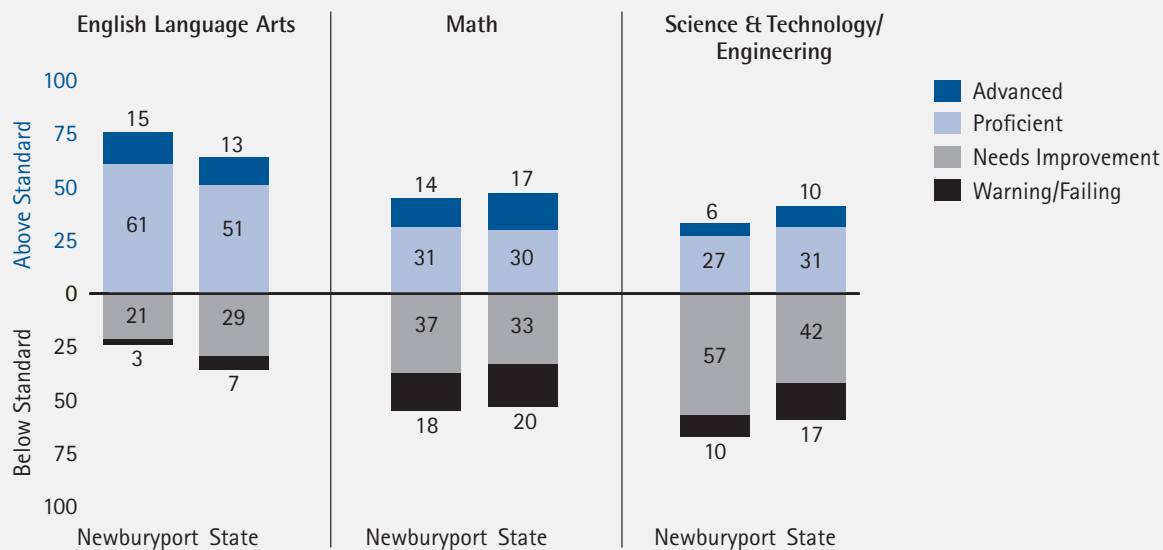
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, approximately three-fifths of all students in Newburyport attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, more than that statewide. More than three-quarters of Newburyport students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), more than two-fifths of Newburyport students attained proficiency in math, and one-third of Newburyport students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Newburyport's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 82 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points greater than that statewide. Newburyport's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 18 PI points.
- In 2006, Newburyport's proficiency gap in ELA was nine PI points, seven PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average

NEWBURYPORT SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS

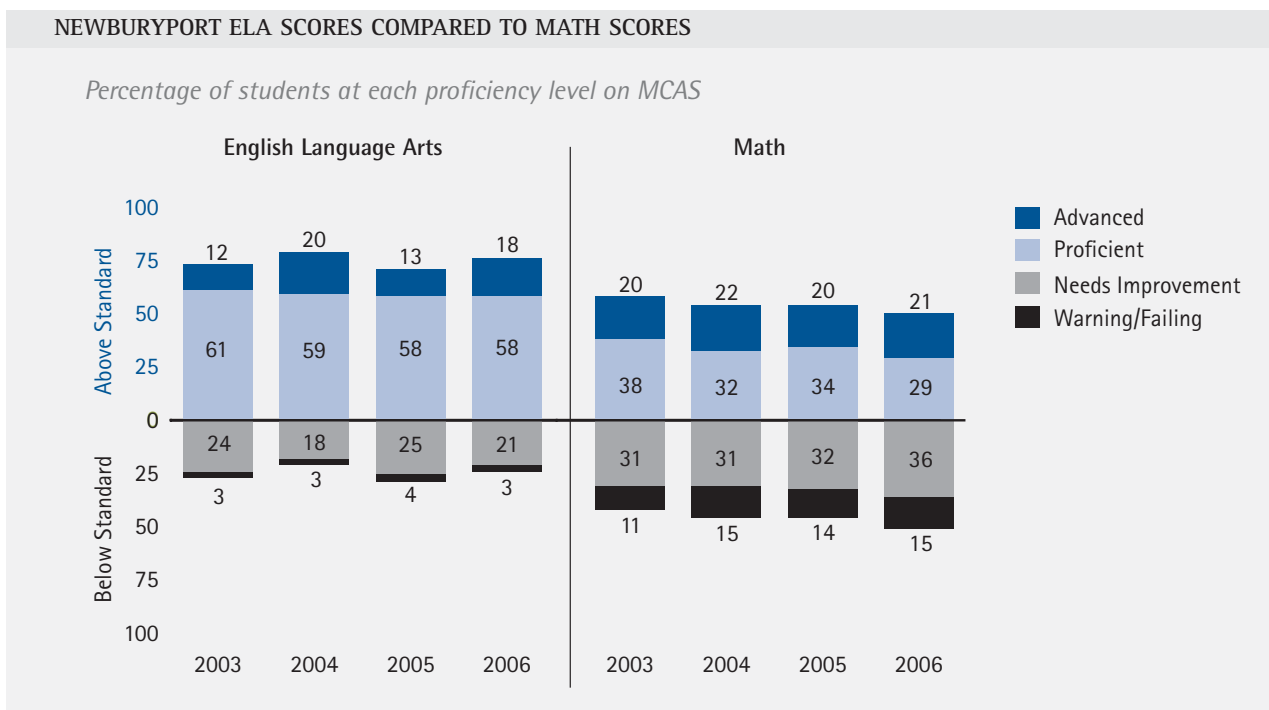


improvement in performance of slightly more than one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Newburyport's proficiency gap in math was 27 PI points in 2006, one PI point narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Newburyport's proficiency gap in STE was 28 PI points, one PI point narrower than that statewide.

3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Newburyport's MCAS performance showed a decline overall, in math, and in STE, and very slight improvement in ELA.

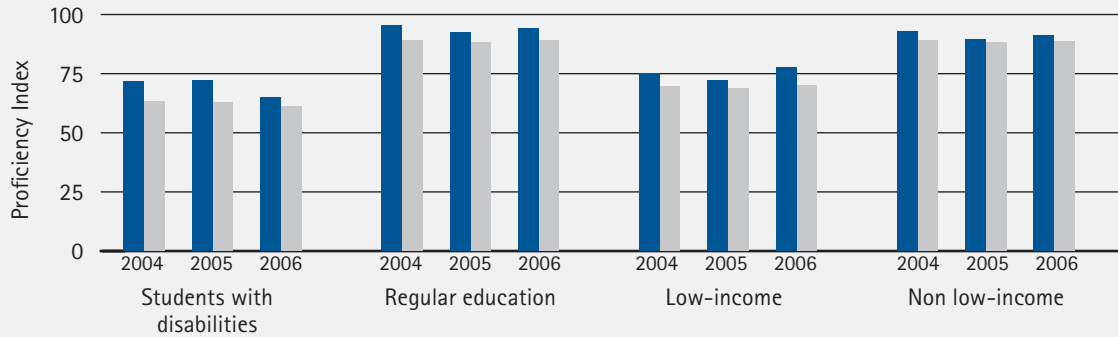
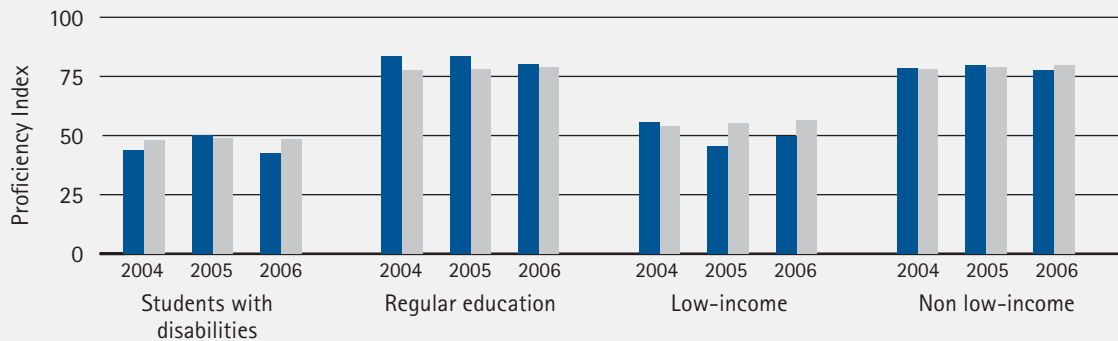
- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories fell by four percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category increased by two percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Newburyport widened from 16 PI points in 2003 to 18 PI points in 2006.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Newburyport showed slight improvement, at an average of approximately one-third PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 10 percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Math performance in Newburyport declined during this period by five PI points. Between 2004 and 2006, Newburyport had a decline in STE performance of six PI points.



4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

- MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Newburyport students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Newburyport in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA and 34 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).
- The proficiency gaps in Newburyport in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). For these subgroups, less than one-third of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, roughly two-thirds of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. For both subgroups, more than half of the students attained proficiency.

NEWBURYPORT STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES

English Language Arts*Math*

Newburyport

State Average

5. *Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?*

- The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 27 PI points in 2003 to 29 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 37 to 38 PI points over this period.
- In Newburyport, regular education students and low-income students had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006, while that of students with disabilities declined during this period. The most improved subgroup in ELA was low-income students.
- In math, all subgroups in Newburyport had a decline in performance between 2003 and 2006. Students with disabilities had the greatest decline in math achievement.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Newburyport received the following performance rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Overall District Management

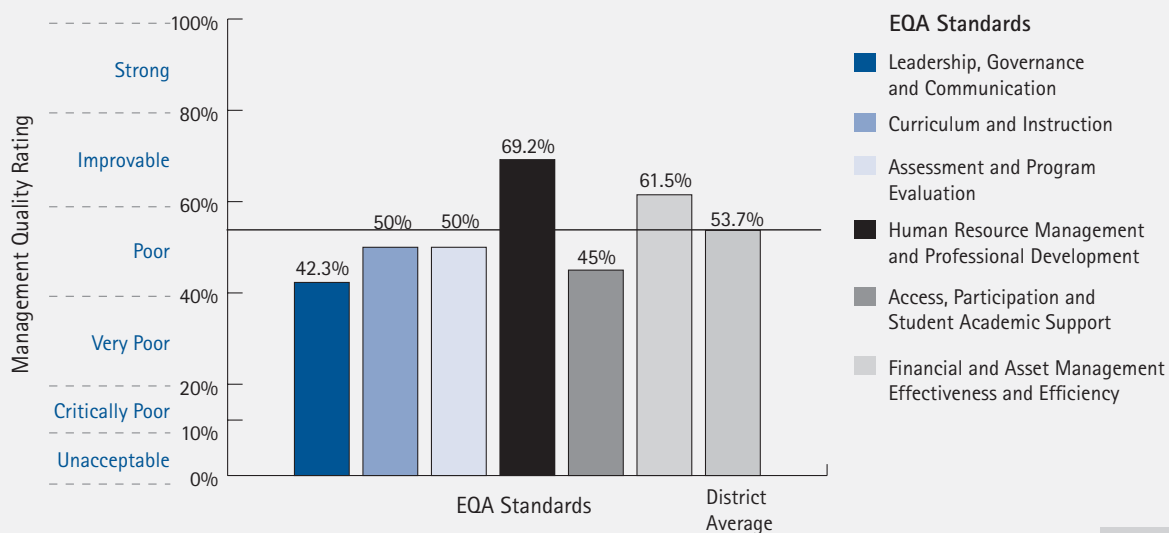
To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a

measure of the effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Newburyport received an overall MQI score of 'Poor' (54 percent). The district performed best on the Human Resource Management standard, and worst on the Leadership and Governance standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing better than expected on the MCAS tests in ELA, though not in math. Over this period, student performance declined overall, in math, and in STE, while improving slightly in ELA. For all subgroups, math performance declined during the review period. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Newburyport, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by MCAS test performance, Newburyport ranked among the 'High' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'Very High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math.

Planning and Governance

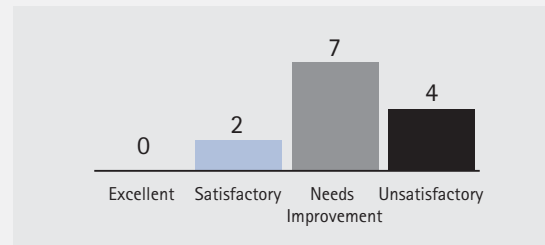
The leadership of the Newburyport Public Schools consisted of the superintendent and the seven-member school committee. The Newburyport school district followed a strategic plan that included a vision, mission statement, and goals. Its District Improvement Plan (DIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were aligned with the strategic plan throughout the period under review. Policies, budgets, and other decisions were based on these plans. The district presented annual progress reports to the school committee and the public on the attainment of DIP and SIP goals as well as goals in the strategic plan. The district was in the fourth year of a five-year strategic plan at the time of the review.

The SIPs for the period under review did not include student achievement goals that were specific, measurable, and based on assessment data. The district was only beginning in 2005-2006 to develop specific benchmarks in student achievement based on assessments. Other than summative reports of the MCAS test results, the district made little use of student achievement data for instructional, curricular, or budgetary decisions. As a result, the curriculum was not closely aligned with the state frameworks, program and instructional changes were rarely implemented to improve student achievement, and MCAS math scores and certain subgroup scores were on the decline and were falling below the state average.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- School administrators regularly reported to the school committee and the public on the achievement of DIP and SIP goals, finances, and student achievement.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not complete effective analyses of disaggregated student achievement data, and did not systematically use achievement data to make curricular, instructional, policy, or budgetary decisions.
- The school district budget was inadequate to maintain or improve programs to increase student achievement despite advocacy by the school committee.
- School committee members, administrators, and staff members noted the need for updated technology and building improvements.
- School committee members were trained and knowledgeable about their responsibilities, but rarely based decisions on achievement data.

Leadership and Communication

School committee members had all been trained and were kept informed by attending Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) conferences on a rotating basis. They understood their roles of concentrating on policy, budget, and the appointment and evaluation of the superintendent. The superintendent delegated the leadership of the schools to principals and gave them appropriate authority in hiring and supervising staff. Annual evaluations of the superintendent and principals were done in accordance with Department of Education (DOE) requirements and were based on the goals of the district and/or schools, but they were not based on student achievement data. Evaluations of other building administrators did not contain all of the categories of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership; they were narratives based on self-imposed goals from the beginning of the year and were less informative and instructive.

During the period under review, communication and collaboration with stakeholders were priorities in the district's strategic plan, the DIP, and the SIPs. The district took several steps to improve communication with parents, making use of e-mail listservs and telephone messaging as well as newsletters and parent meetings. Administrators created a Curriculum Advisory Board (CAB) and Professional Development Committee (PDC) of teachers to elicit faculty input on curriculum and professional development. Union officials reported that the superintendent's door was always open to them, and they were able to work out most issues and grievances at the administrative level. The school committee renewed its commitment to the joint education committee consisting of some of its members and members of the city council, which met frequently during the budget season to review the district budget in detail; this committee had not been meeting with any frequency or purpose. The administration revised the budget document to make it more transparent and to help answer questions raised by city council officials and members of the public.

Although the school committee advocated for educationally sound budgets, the approved budgets were not adequate to maintain existing programs such as elementary foreign language, theater arts, wellness, libraries, stringed music, and technology. A total of 33 FTE staff positions were cut during the review period, and fees were instituted for transportation, athletics, and extracurricular activities. The budget did not support new programs to improve student achievement, including consistent, standards-based curricula in middle school mathematics and elementary literacy, and support services for students needing remediation and for special education. The district relied increasingly on school choice funds to supplement funding from the city. There were some inequities among buildings, especially in special education spaces and in infrastructure.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Newburyport Public Schools faced challenges in the areas of effective curriculum development and instructional practice – essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

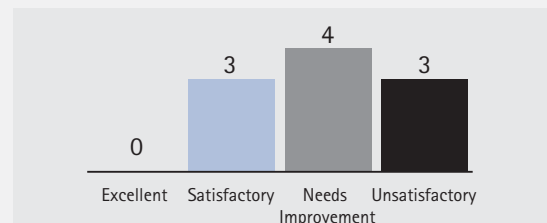
During the period under review, the district did not implement curricula for all grade levels in the tested core content areas that clearly addressed all components of the state curriculum frameworks. A major component of the total curriculum that was missing was a districtwide assessment system so that teachers could determine if students were effectively making academic progress. Student scores on the MCAS tests indicated that the curriculum, particularly at the middle school, was not fully aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. The district had three directors of curriculum in five years. This turnover in leadership impeded the district's efforts to produce a complete K-12 curriculum document in a timely way. During the period under review, the district was in the process of having teachers complete diary mapping, or the mapping of what was taught by individual teachers, to be followed by consensus mapping, or the agreement of teachers as to what should be taught in a particular subject and at a particular grade level.

A review of documents provided to the EQA team and interviews with administrators, building principals, department heads, the current director of curriculum, and members of the Curriculum Advisory Board indicated to the examiners little evidence of horizontal and vertical alignment in grades K-8 in the areas of ELA, math, and science. Administrators and teachers reported that responsibility for the use, alignment, consistency, and effectiveness of the district's curricula rested with the director of curriculum, department heads, the CAB, and building principals.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district had a technology plan that addressed the appropriate use of educational technology, but little use of technology integration was seen in classroom observations.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not have a complete K-12 curriculum document for each of the tested core subjects of ELA, math, and science that was aligned with the state curriculum frameworks.
- A lack of consistent curriculum leadership (three curriculum directors in five years) hindered the development of a complete and aligned K-12 curriculum.
- Analysis of student achievement data did not determine allocation of instructional time in the district.
- Failure to implement the use of formative and summative assessments, and the inability to provide adequate data analysis based on ongoing assessments, hindered the effectiveness of over-all teacher instruction.

A review of documents provided to the EQA team and interviews with district personnel indicated that the regular review and revision of curricula was an informal process. The criteria used to review and revise curricula included looking at the results of the MCAS tests. To facilitate this process, the software program TechPaths was introduced during the 2006-2007 school year and aided curriculum development and the review and revision of the K-12 curriculum in the district. Documents provided to the EQA team indicated that no comprehensive assessment of learning took place during the period under review. Despite declining MCAS math scores, no program evaluation had been initiated for the K-8 math program. Individual teachers, individual grade levels, or individual schools used student achievement data to allocate instructional time, which often varied, in the tested core content areas.

Effective Instruction

During the interview process with the leadership team, participants told the EQA examiners that the district had and used appropriate technology as an integral part of the education process. A review of the district technology plan for school years 2004-2005 through 2006-2007 and the Elementary Instructional Technology Competency Assessment, 2005-2006, confirmed this. Because the district strived to incorporate instructional technology into all curriculum areas, the goal of instructional technology reflected an integrated model rather than separate computer classes. According to data provided by the DOE, the average number of students per computer in the district was 3.6 compared to the state average of 4.9. Although 100 percent of the computers in the district had access to the Internet, the computers at the elementary schools were very outdated and too slow to be used for instruction. Although the district had a technology plan and a curriculum with benchmarks, progress made in integrating computer instruction into the classroom was not evident in classroom observations. In addition, two out of three curriculum/technology integration positions, those at the elementary and middle schools, had been eliminated by the end of 2005-2006.

Interviews with administrators and department heads indicated that the district used formative and summative student assessment data to monitor the effectiveness of teacher instruction. A review of documents by the EQA team and conversations with the leadership team and teachers indicated that there was a lack of evidence to support this statement. At the middle and secondary levels, interviewees lacked a full and accurate understanding of the difference between formative and summative assessment strategies. Overall, the district lacked a necessary K-12 assessment system that included benchmarks and exit criteria in each grade and subject area.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

The district primarily relied on the MCAS tests at respective grade levels for summative test data. At the elementary schools, no written exit criteria were in place for each grade level indicating what each student should know and be able to do in each subject area in order to be promoted. The number of retentions was low at the elementary and middle schools. Although the middle school had some teacher-generated unit final tests, they were not consistently used across teams for all students. In 2003, the high school, in preparation for a New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) visit, developed and/or revised common midterms and final exams. High school teachers in departmental meetings reviewed and analyzed these exams through the leadership of department heads.

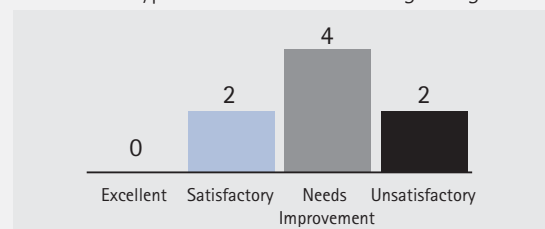
The district was just beginning to use formative testing to inform teacher practice. Expanding the model used in the Title I program, teachers were beginning to use the Dynamic Indicators Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in grades K-1 and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) in grades 2-3 to test students three times a year and to measure individual student achievement against a standard or benchmark. The district was just beginning to establish benchmarks in each core subject and at each grade level.

Interviewees at the middle and upper grades were unable to articulate and demonstrate an understanding of the difference between formative and summative testing. At the middle school, teachers did not collect or analyze formative student assessment data during the school year to assess the

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The analysis of student achievement data focused on trends, patterns, and item analyses of the MCAS scores in the aggregate.

Areas for Improvement

- A review of the strategic plan, the DIP, and the respective SIPs indicated that increasing the rigor of academics based on an analysis of the MCAS test results was not a top priority of the district.
- The district had not developed measurable grade-level benchmarks and exit criteria in each K-8 core content area nor implemented a systemic assessment system to inform instruction and administrative decision-making.
- The district relied primarily on the MCAS tests for assessment results and had not yet developed an assessment system to provide formative assessment information to guide better instruction.
- Although the district engaged in internal and external evaluations, nearly complete turnover of central office administrators and principals delayed application of these recommendations to improve programs.

ongoing progress of students.

Teachers collected summative test data and analyzed them in the aggregate in order to find trends and patterns for each test. Teachers and administrators worked together to perform an item analysis to determine which items most students did poorly on, in the aggregate, in order to consider changes to the curriculum. In 2006-2007, the district was just beginning to disaggregate subgroup data in order to inform needed changes to specific programs or to come up with ways to recognize and begin to close the achievement gap between regular education students and those in special education programs.

Program Evaluation

The district did engage in a number of external program evaluations. Some were mandatory, such as the Coordinated Program Review (CPR) done by the Department of Education in 2005. The district completed a NEASC evaluation in 2003 for reaccreditation of the high school. The preschool had a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) visit in 2005 to achieve reaccreditation in early childhood learning.

The district analyzed the results of the MCAS tests. This was done during district in-service time, but the information was not used consistently to evaluate the ELA, math, or science programs or to make changes in the special needs program during the period under review. Internal program evaluation began to become better organized when the turnover of almost every administrative position, including the position of superintendent, made it feasible and necessary to examine the present state of the district in order to be successful under new leadership. District staff was aware of the need to increase the rigor of the academic program, especially in mathematics and in the special education program, as evidenced by the MCAS test results.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

The Newburyport Public Schools advertised for and sought highly qualified candidates to fill the positions of those who departed the district. The school system was in the process of eliminating many positions due to budget cuts. Although there were limits to hiring salaries, the district did not deter from hiring those who were highly qualified and commanded a higher rate of pay. The district's hiring practices were consistent, involving administrators, teachers, parents, and the superintendent. All administrators were currently licensed for the positions they held. The district had 21 teachers who were working on waiver at the time of the EQA review. Due to a new requirement that all middle school teachers be certified in a specific content area, 15 of those teachers were working toward such certification. Progress toward certification of teachers on waiver was monitored by district staff.

During the period under review, curriculum mapping was the districtwide focus of professional development at all grade levels. Administrators and teachers had consultant training and ongoing professional development within the district to map and come to consensus on what should be taught at each grade and in each subject. The goal was alignment with the state curriculum frameworks and development of more explicit benchmarks and exit criteria. TestWiz training was not widespread in the district, and during the period under review, in most

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district's human resource policies and practices encouraged professional growth and recognition, placing high priority on retaining professional staff.

Areas for Improvement

- Evaluations of teachers were not necessarily timely, and the stated comments/recommendations and the ratings on various indicators appeared incongruous, communicating a mixed message regarding the need for improvement.
- The funding of the district's professional development plan was not adequate with respect to the needs of the district.
- The mentor program for teachers failed to include an emphasis on assessment, data analysis, and use of student achievement data to inform practice.
- The district allotted minimal time for collaboration and mandatory in-service; the district was in the process of creating 11 release days in the 2007-2008 school calendar.

schools analysis of data was limited to trends, patterns, and item analyses. Analysis of programs and of subgroup data was in the beginning stages, as was more training across the district on using data to make better decisions.

Professional Development

The district made efforts to encourage professional growth, recognition, and retention of effective staff members. All new teachers were required to take the Effective Teacher training, and they were required to take differentiated instruction training in their second year unless they could provide evidence of prior completion of this training. The mentoring program for new teachers encouraged regular communication, support, and encouragement. Teachers were recognized through their receipt of the Edward Molin award, through acknowledgement of their accomplishments such as attainment of additional degrees, and through requests to present their best practices at faculty meetings. Stipended extra-curricular positions and course reimbursements were also available to teaching staff.

Evaluation

Teachers and administrators stated in interviews that non-professional status teachers were evaluated on an annual basis in Newburyport and that teachers on professional status were evaluated in alternate years. They also told the EQA examiners that teachers on waivers were evaluated on an annual basis, although EQA examiners found this was not always the case. In a review of a sample of 40 teacher evaluations, the EQA examiners found that 13 out of 40 written evaluations of teachers were not always completed in a timely way in accordance with district policy during the period under review. Furthermore, EQA examiners found that there was one teacher on professional status and one teacher on non-professional status who had no completed evaluations.

Administrators reported that they annually met with the superintendent to prepare goals and met at least once a month to discuss progress toward the attainment of goals. A self-evaluation and a meeting with the superintendent preceded the superintendent's final evaluation. The EQA examiners found that evaluations of district administrators by the former superintendent were timely, informative, and instructive, and they promoted professional growth. Student performance was not a factor in these evaluations.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

Services

During the period under review, the district did not utilize assessment data effectively. It relied primarily on the MCAS test results to monitor student achievement. A curriculum mapping process had been underway for several years. The ultimate goal, that the curriculum be aligned horizontally and vertically, had not been achieved at the time of the review especially since benchmarks and exit criteria had not been created and implemented. The limited number of staff members trained in using TestWiz further hampered utilization of assessment data as an effective tool to adjust instruction.

When teachers identified students needing support, the district offered few remedial services with more time for learning. A literacy program for support was in place at the elementary grades, but not all students had equal access to it. For example, not all staff had received training in using Project Read at the elementary grades, and the Brown Elementary School no longer qualified for Title I services. No comparable services for math support were available at this level.

At the middle school, district staff had serious concerns about the performance of special education students on the MCAS tests, especially in math. Students who were performing at the lowest levels attended a math lab that included additional support, instead of attending classes offered to regular education students. Further, the district offered little additional support for at-risk students who were not on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Both student and teacher attendance rates were above the state average.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not utilize disaggregated data to inform the provision of support for at-risk populations.
- A review by EQA examiners of the 2006 MCAS data for special education students in grades 4-8 demonstrated a need for examination of the support being given to at-risk students in ELA and math.
- The curriculum mapping process remains to be completed so that benchmarks and exit criteria could be established at each grade level.
- The high school lacked a strategy for increasing subgroup participation in accelerated courses. Although parents could sign a waiver and change a student's placement, no extra support was provided to encourage students.
- The district had a dropout prevention program, but not a dropout recovery program.

At the high school, programs were not proactive in providing support before a student failed a course or the grade 10 MCAS exam. Additionally, students taking Integrated Math I, Integrated Math II, or Pre-Algebra in grade 9 or 10 were not taking courses that were aligned with the grade 10 MCAS test, and they needed a means to accelerate their learning.

Statements in interviews, as well as reports reviewed, indicated a lack of effective inclusion teaching at the elementary and middle school levels during the period under review. Some co-teaching took place at the high school in the lower-level courses. The removal of children from the regular classroom in grades K-12 raised concern about the need for exposure to the same grade-level curriculum, as well as the need to provide appropriate instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Attendance

According to interviewees, administrators, teachers, and parents commonly viewed the district as providing a safe learning environment. It was, as one teacher described it, a good place to be. This perception was supported by favorable attendance rates for both students and teachers. According to interviewees, most teachers who departed the district did so to retire.

Discipline, Retention, and Dropout Services

Interviewees expressed concern regarding transitions from level to level and school to school in the district. Programs were put into place that attempted to alleviate some of the stress felt by students and their parents. Those individuals charged with overseeing the transitions did not have the benefit of exit criteria or a vertically aligned curriculum. Teachers at the sending and receiving schools did schedule transition meetings so staff members could share information about students and programs. Students and parents were invited to their new schools to meet teachers and see the new facility.

The high school had a program for preventing dropouts. During an interview, interviewees described the strategy for keeping students in school, consisting of meetings held, alternatives presented, and data shared in an effort to keep a student in school. However, once a student dropped out of school, the district did not follow up and attempt to have the student return. The rate of student suspensions in the district was below the state average.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

Budget Process and Financial Support

Budget reductions over the review period led to decreased instructional services for students. Interviewees told the EQA examiners that there had been cuts in music and foreign language programs in the district. For example, the district eliminated foreign language at the elementary schools, and reduced it at the middle school such that it became an exploratory program rather than a regular subject. The theater arts program was eliminated at the middle school. Across the district, 33 positions were eliminated during the review period, primarily impacting the elementary and middle schools.

The budget process was open and the resulting document was clear and understandable with all necessary information complete and current. City administrators informed the examiners that the community was satisfied with the process by which the budget had been documented and presented to it during the last two years of the review period. All budget sessions were held during open school committee meetings and were televised on the local cable channel.

No formal practice or procedure was in place for the use of aggregated or disaggregated student achievement data to develop a more effective budget. The school committee received a general overview of the MCAS test results which highlighted weaknesses, but not a formal analysis with aggregated and disaggregated data. The district's budget was driven instead by a cap on the budget increase, which was determined by city officials and by the amount of state aid that the district was to receive.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Newburyport received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district had an up-to-date preventative maintenance plan and a five-year capital improvement plan.

Areas for Improvement

- The EQA examiners concluded that there was a lack of school safety with respect to unauthorized entrance.
- There was a lack of equity among the elementary schools; not all were equally equipped for a modern educational program, and all were in need of replacement or renovation.
- Instructional services to students declined during the period under review due to restricted budgets and rising health and retirement costs.
- High student bussing fees, activity fees, and athletic fees created a financial burden for the parents of the district's children.
- The lack of a written agreement or memorandum of understanding concerning city charges to the district led to confusion on the part of both city and district administrators as to the basis and validity of those charges.

The district used MUNIS software, as did the city, to track expenditures from school accounts and to forecast line items when necessary. However, the two systems, while the same, were not electronically connected to one another. According to the business office staff, this required the information for purchase orders, invoices, and balance statements to be entered and printed out at the school department and then sent to city hall to be re-entered by city personnel into MUNIS on the municipal side. This process was inefficient and created additional work hours and the opportunity for data entry errors. The district's auditors had cited this incongruence in each of the last two years of the review period.

The district had performed evaluations of the cost effectiveness of some of its programs. The district undertook these evaluations with the goal of finding ways to save money. When asked, the assistant superintendent was unable to name any evaluations that were designed to assess the effectiveness of programs based on student performance or need.

Facilities and Safety

At the time of the review, the elementary schools, built in 1871, 1923, and 1957, were not suitable for modern educational programs because of infrastructure and electrical deficiencies. The district's custodial and maintenance staff kept these buildings clean and maintained to the extent possible, given the age of the buildings and the limits of the district budget. The assistant superintendent had business manager responsibilities, along with human resources responsibilities and other administrative duties. She was responsible for the budget's development and presentation to the school committee and city council with the superintendent.

The main office doors of most schools were found unlocked when visited. Although examiners were told that the doorways were locked and main entrances monitored, they found that they were open, and in order to sign in they had to go into the school offices and seek out the office personnel. At one school, students opened a side entrance, and only when asked directed the EQA examiner to the main office. Based on these experiences, the EQA examiners concluded that there was a lack of school safety with respect to unauthorized entrance. The district developed a comprehensive crisis management plan containing policies and procedures for school emergencies, and reviewed the plan annually with local police and fire officials. The policies and procedures were disseminated in staff and student handbooks, and drills were held. Administrators were aware of emergency procedures and reported that they had been successfully followed.

CONCLUSION

During the review period, the Newburyport Public Schools were considered a 'High' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math on the MCAS tests. More than three-fifths of Newburyport's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. However, the EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Poor,' with its highest score on the Assessment and Program Evaluation standard and its lowest on the Leadership and Governance standard.

At the time of the EQA examination, the Newburyport Public Schools was under new leadership. In December 2006, the new superintendent presented the Newburyport School Committee with *Superintendent's Entry Plan Report*. The stated purpose of the plan was to "find problems" to identify and address, since, as the new superintendent stated, "there is always room for improvement." The EQA audit was able to objectively verify for the superintendent that his report, or "administrative scan," was very much on target in isolating areas where improvement was needed in the district.

Although the district's strategic plan, School Improvement Plans, and professional development plans were aligned during the previous five years, they were very heavily focused on school environment, rather than the rigor of academic instruction. The former superintendent was largely inaccessible, due to extended family caretaking, but explained that homicidal and suicidal activity, and student behavior, in the Newburyport Public Schools had influenced the focus of district goals during the review period, which was confirmed by veteran administrators. The district had taken steps to improve communication with parents and the community, and its leaders also created a collaborative environment with the community and union officials. The new superintendent and current administrators were in the process of reevaluating their status and five-year goals, based on measurable academic objectives.

The district enrolled a stable population of students who rarely qualified for extra instructional services, as determined by participation in the free or reduced-cost lunch program. Students' need for tutoring in English as a second language was minimal, and the district rarely enrolled homeless students. The number of students receiving special education services was lower than the state average. Despite these facts, the percentage of Newburyport students attaining overall proficiency on the MCAS tests decreased from 2003 to 2006, which was an area of concern to members of the school committee and to other stakeholders in the community. District leaders noted the need to increase the level of academic rigor provided to and demanded of all students. For instance, many of the students whose performance on

the MCAS math tests was below the proficient level were taking math classes through the special education program or were taking math classes that were not aligned to the curriculum in the regular education program. In addition, the district lacked policies, procedures, and practices to increase the representation of subgroups in advanced or accelerated classes.

Curriculum mapping was the focus of districtwide professional development during the period under review. Professional development offerings did not provide training opportunities in data analysis for all staff. Newburyport did not have a complete grades K-12 curriculum that was aligned with the state curriculum frameworks or aligned vertically or horizontally. The district needed to complete the development of formative benchmarks and exit criteria in order to assist teachers in adjusting instruction and to determine whether students should be promoted to the next grade. The lack of an aligned curriculum was contributing, in part, to declining student performance on the MCAS tests. In addition, the district needed to undertake program evaluations to address deficiencies evidenced by the test data. Although staff identified students in need of support, the district provided few remedial programs for those students. A fraction of the students who were in need of MCAS preparation classes participated in the ones offered after school.

A major challenge in Newburyport was overcrowding at the elementary level and the impact of maintaining class size and staffing with a level-funded budget. For each year of the review period, the district had a level-funded budget. The budget was not developed based on student achievement data. Fixed costs such as contracts and employee benefits continued to rise, resulting in cuts to staffing, instructional programs, and instructional materials, including the maintenance of computer technology. The elementary and middle grades have borne the brunt of most of these cuts as of FY 2007. In addition, the three elementary schools were in need of replacement or renovation. Despite cuts to staff positions, the district made strides to promote the professional growth, recognition, and retention of effective teaching staff.

During the period under review, a high number of students who attended Newburyport Public Schools were enrolled through school choice. The school district was very dependent on school choice funds from nearby communities and needed to remain highly respected and competitive in order to retain school choice students and the funding they brought to the district. District leaders expressed concern that additional cuts might be necessary in the future, which could result in the loss of effective teachers who would be integral to efforts to accelerate academic improvement within Newburyport.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts – those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education – received an even more detailed review.

Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

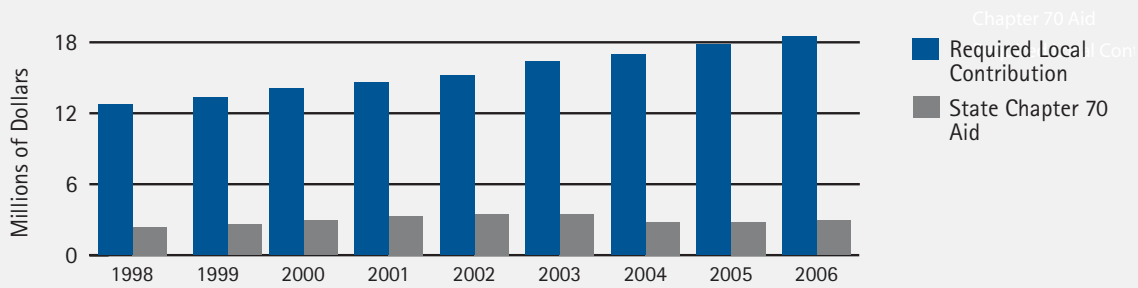
APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis	FTE: Full-Time Equivalent	MQI: Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system
ADA: Average Daily Attendance	FY: Fiscal Year	MUNIS: Municipal Information System
ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment	Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency	NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
API: Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)	GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board	NCLB: No Child Left Behind
ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance	GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges
AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress	GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	NRT: Norm-Referenced Test
CAP: Corrective Action Plan	GRADU: The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry	NSBA: National School Boards Association
CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures	IEP: Individualized Education Program	NSS: Net School Spending
CD: Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates	Improvement Gap: A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time	Performance Gap: A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district
CMP: Connected Math Program	IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan	PI: Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency
CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information	IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan	PIM: Performance Improvement Management
CPI: Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)	ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan	POA: Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process
CPR: Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE	LASW: Looking at Student Work	Proficiency Gap: A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency
CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test	LEP: Limited English Proficient	QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory
CSR: Comprehensive School Reform	MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials	Rate of Improvement: The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap
DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan	MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees	SAT: A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders
DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills	MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents	SEI: Sheltered English Immersion
DIP: District Improvement Plan	MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators	SIMS: Student Information Management System
DOE: Department of Education	MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System	SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
DPDP: District Professional Development Plan	MCAS-Alt: Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency	SIP: School Improvement Plan
DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment	MCPPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official	SPED: Special Education
ELA: English Language Arts	MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral	STE: Science and Technology/Engineering
ELL: English Language Learners	MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment	TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill
EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index	MPI: Math Proficiency Index	
ESL: English as a Second Language		
FLNE: First Language Not English		
FRL/N: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No		
FRL/Y: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes		

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

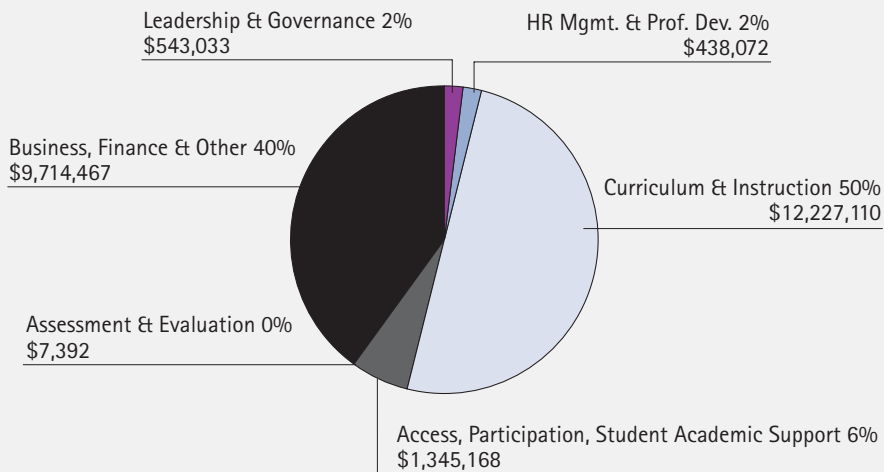
A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program — the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Newburyport's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. The district exceeded the state net school spending (NSS) requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, NSS increased from \$21,925,398 to \$23,061,046; Chapter 70 aid increased from \$2,793,820 to \$2,908,020; the required local contribution increased from \$16,953,486 to \$18,514,828; and the foundation enrollment increased from 2,207 to 2,284. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual NSS remained flat at 13 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total NSS reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report decreased from 59 to 58 percent.

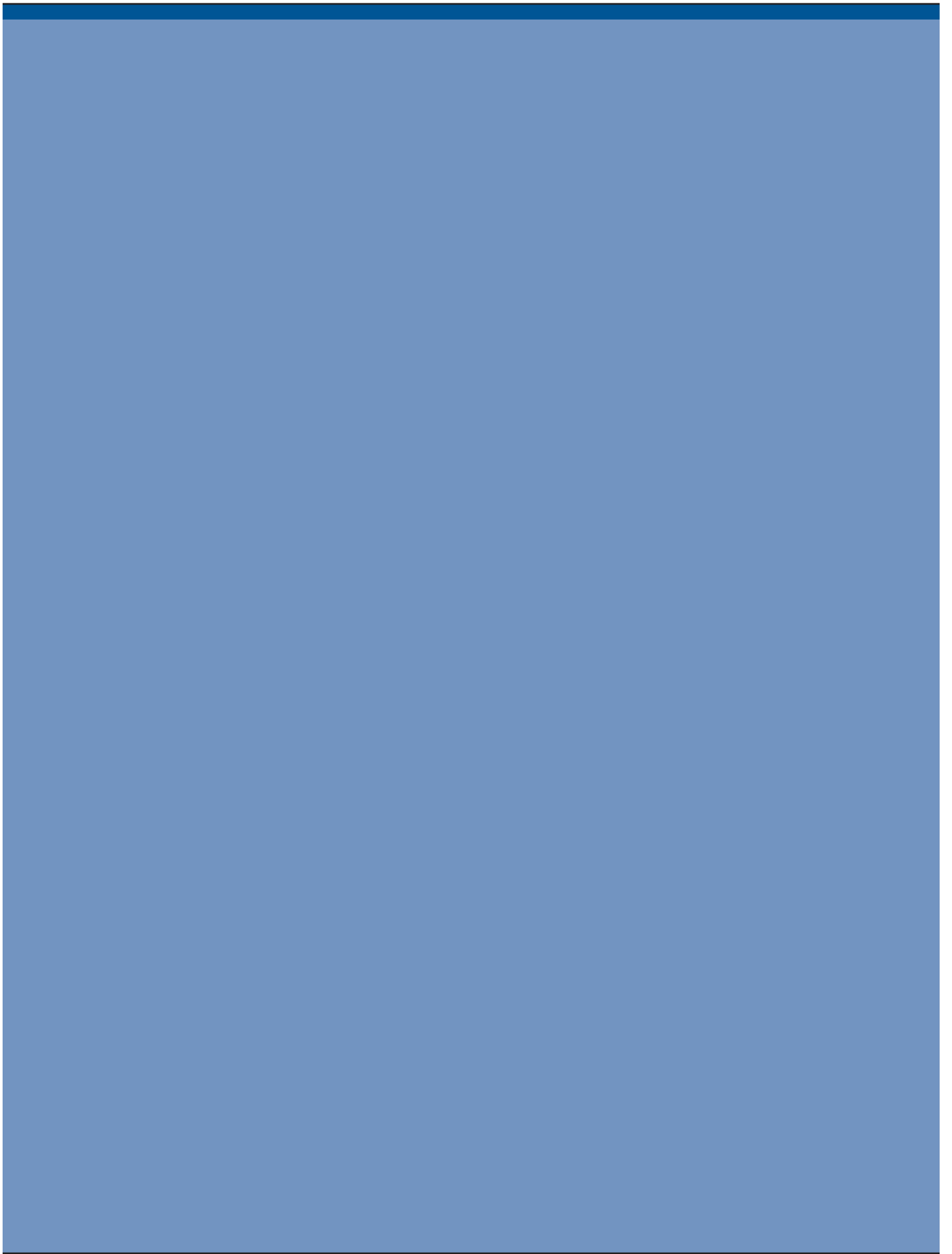
WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR NEWBURYPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR NEWBURYPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

FY05 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)





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